

Whenever property regimes become the subject of policy reform, social conflict is observed. The positive analysis of property reforms in post-socialist societies is an especially challenging research topic, as both property regimes and the political systems initiating and supervising reforms are simultaneously undergoing institutional changes.

In "Property Reform and Social Conflict," Markus Hanisch addresses two important questions on the subject of property reform. The first concerns the extent to which the determinants of political decision-making as outlined in contemporary economic theories are appropriate within a transitional economy context. The other considers the empirical emergence of de-facto rights as they result from agricultural contracting and economic interaction in the reform process.

In several chapters addressing contemporary theories, a wide range of accounts taken from the frameworks of New Institutional Economics, Public Choice and Transaction Cost Theory are discussed with regard to the suitability of assumptions and hypotheses in explaining the emergence and change of property rights in transition. These are put together in a multi-level analytical framework for analyzing the property reform process in transition. In the empirical chapters, the author creates narratives using interviews and rich documentation about important stages and relevant decisions in the reform process. Reasoning backwards from a specific outcome in the property rights process to the relevant decisions and actors involved, he explains the unforeseeable pace and conflictive nature of agricultural reform in Bulgaria between 1990 and 2000.

Through this discussion, he not only challenges the contemporary theory of property rights but also sheds light upon phenomena that have remained unexplained by scholars of institutional change in Central and Eastern European agriculture. These include the persistence of agricultural cooperatives, the prominence of share-cropping arrangements, and the growing importance of subsistence farming.

This book should be of interest to social scientists, positive political theorists, analysts of property reform processes, agricultural economists interested in institutional change and land reform, and to those holding a general interest in issues of concern to post-socialist Bulgaria.